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Contested Loyalty: Debates Over Patriotism in the Civil War North

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Review

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Civil War historians have spilled much ink debating the nature of Confederate nationalism. Did white southerners develop a genuine sense of national identity? Did they grasp all that wartime loyalty demanded of them? If so, were they willing to make such sacrifices? If not, can these deficiencies help to explain Confederate defeat?

But debates about patriotism, loyalty, free speech, and appropriate wartime conduct were hardly confined to rebeldom. As J. Matthew Gallman, Gary W. Gallagher, and a growing number of recent scholars have pointed out, these questions provoked no less anxiety on the northern home front. An ethnically and politically diverse lot, northerners "failed to reach consensus on what loyalty meant or how citizens in times of war might demonstrate it" (1). How did one express dissent or opposition to the war above the Mason-Dixon? What did loyalty and patriotism demand from a people at war?

Editor Robert M. Sandow has assembled ten essays that demonstrate the complexities and rich interpretive possibilities of these questions. *Contested Loyalty* confirms that debates over appropriate wartime behavior reached well beyond the realm of politics, annexing "homes, city streets, places of work and worship, and onto college campuses" (1). No less significantly, this anthology reaches beyond the Midwest (owing to its reputation for shrill Copperheadism, it is the region most frequently associated with questions of loyalty) to consider how these contests played out in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Refreshingly, only one essay takes the Midwest as its principal focus.

Melinda Lawson's lead essay sets the tone for the volume, considering how Wendell Phillips, George Julian, and Abraham Lincoln conceived of their "duty" to the nation. "The Union meant many things to many people," Lawson writes, "but for those who were truly invested in the Declaration's proposition of liberty and equality, the challenge was substantial: how best to serve

a nation founded on ideals of liberty and equality, yet held together by an acceptance of slavery?" Phillips, Julian, and Lincoln "responded differently to that challenge," she concludes, but "each weighed principle against consequence" (22).

Not every northerner subscribed to this trio's view of the founding documents. In his essay on Copperheadism in Connecticut, Matthew Warshauer reveals that "Peace Democrats clung to the belief that it was they who were the true adherents of Constitution and Union." Their "duty" was to resist the Republicans' costly war—a reckless crusade for emancipation (66). The solemnity with which Connecticut Peace Democrats embraced this mission, Warshauer argues, can be seen in their "consistent ideological stance from the beginning of the war to the end" (57). During the Civil War, Connecticut lived up to its reputation as the "land of steady habits."

Rank partisanship likewise animates Jonathan W. White's splendid essay. In February 1864, the Pennsylvania state legislature took up a bill to compensate civilians who lost property or suffered damages during the Gettysburg campaign. Alleging treachery on the home front, a Republican state legislator proposed a resolution that obliged citizens seeking damage claims to supply "positive proofs of their loyalty" (88). The ensuing debate betrayed the competing definitions of loyalty espoused by Republicans, who insisted that "loyalty" demanded "adherence to Lincoln's war policies," and Democrats, who "believed that loyalty entailed adherence to 'the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was'" (83). By insisting on loyalty oaths and absolute fidelity to their vision of the war, Republicans in the Keystone State "conflate[d] their conceptions of loyalty with treason" (84).

Discussions of loyalty also annexed personal lives. In Julie A. Mujic's adept hands, the courtship correspondence of Gideon Winan Allen, a committed Copperhead, and Annie Cox, a stanch abolitionist, bears tantalizing new clues about how ordinary Americans "learned to incorporate" the war's "issues, imperatives, and interrogations into their daily discourse." Debates about the meaning of the war, the necessity of emancipation, and appropriate forms of political expression became a vehicle for the betrothed young couple to "shape the nature of their relationship" (129).

Allen and Cox triumphed over their sharp political differences, but as the historian Sean A. Scott demonstrates in his terrific essay on the Presbyterian minister William S. Plumer, even the faintest whiff of disloyalty could prove personally and professionally devastating. "Average civilians and laypersons," Scott points out, "closely monitored the actions and words of northern

ministers to find evidence of loyalty" (170). By insisting "that political matters such as war had no place in the church" and refusing "to pray for Union victories," Plumer, whose "close friendships" with Southerners only invited further suspicion, failed to pass muster with the many northerners who demanded (and often received) open expressions of support for the war from the pulpit (168-169). Ultimately, Plumer was forced from his congregation in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. Even those working in war-related industries were not immune from allegations of treachery, as Timothy J. Orr demonstrates in his fine piece on the firing of fifteen Allegheny Arsenal employees in May 1863. "Without an overarching concept to connect factory work to loyalty," Orr writes, "Civil War workers fell prey to political extremism" (221, 235).

One of the collection's great strengths is the careful attention it pays to gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Judith Ann Giesberg's contribution examines the Philadelphia women who, by stitching army uniforms, "found a political voice with which to engage the rhetoric about loyalty" (207). Ryan W. Keating's chapter rethinks "the way that Irish, Irish Americans, and their friends and neighbors understood their own place in Northern society and as part of the Union war effort" (239). Keating reminds that the New York City Draft Riots have served to efface both Irish sacrifices on the battlefield and the Irish regiments that "quickly moved to distance themselves from the dubious acts of their countrymen" (253). He encourages scholars to pay attention to local communities and the differences within ethnic responses to the war. Finally, Thaddeus M. Romansky retrieves "military protest actions…as a crucial link in the chain between antebellum protest culture and the efforts for full citizenship in Reconstruction and beyond." He contends that "Northern black soldiers resolved conflicting loyalties to the national government and to the national creed through military protest" (289).

Edited volumes are notoriously uneven, but this collection succeeds in pulling together ten compelling and well-researched essays of uniformly high quality. Each essay contributes to a richer understanding of the northern home front, illuminating important contests behind the lines—debates that would redound in the so-called "peace" that followed.

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